

IN MY OWN WORDS
EXPERIENCES FROM THE
TEACHER'S ASSISTANT
PROGRAMME.

THE BASIC EDUCATION EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE (BEEI) IS THE FLAGSHIP PROJECT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL EMPLOYMENT STIMULUS, LAUNCHED IN 2020 BY THE PRESIDENCY AS A RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC-INDUCED RECESSION. THE SCALE OF THE PROGRAMME IS UNPRECEDENTED WITHIN THE TIMEFRAMES, WITH THE STIMULUS CREATING ONE MILLION SHORT-TERM OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PERIOD FROM INCEPTION IN LATE 2020 TO OCTOBER 2023

Read 'One million and counting: the Presidential Employment Stimulus', to learn more about the BEEI programme.



The BEEI is one of the largest programme, and it includes the majority of the jobs created by the PES. Known as the teacher's assistant programme, the BEEI is implemented by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). **IN FOUR PHASES BETWEEN 2020 AND 2023, IT HAS PLACED 860 000 EDUCATION ASSISTANTS AND GENERAL ASSISTANTS IN 23 000 SCHOOLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.** Beyond assisting with COVID-19 response in schools, education assistants supported teaching and learning in classrooms, while general assistants supported school maintenance, security, food gardens, sports and after-school care.



276 627 beneficiaries

South Africa is a young country with 21,6 million people between the ages of 15 and 34 years old. But many of them are struggling to find opportunities that will build their skills and experience, and engage in income-generating opportunities. For our country to thrive, we desperately need to support and harness our youth bulge. But 9.4 million young people are not in any form of employment, education or training. It's like trying to save water while keeping the taps on.

When talking about the impact of public employment programmes, we often refer to large numbers: opportunities, schools and learners supported. But only rarely do we get to read and engage with the stories of people whose lives were touched and impacted.

As a campaign advocating for youth-centred and evidence-based solutions to youth unemployment. Youth Capital believes that young people's stories must be central to our conversation on the unemployment crisis. In the next few pages, Youth Capital turns the spotlight on some of the young people who were placed in schools as teacher's assistants, and we asked them to share their experiences.

These stories, told in the assistants' own words, are different in detail, but they all highlight how the short-term experience re-ignited their hopes, dreams and purpose for their future; and how the local economy was stimulated by the monthly stipends.

South Africa suffers from a high level of structural unemployment. This means that every young person who sets out to complete their education, looks for a job or starts their side hustles faces systemic challenges all on their own (from lack of access to data to search for jobs online, to taxi fare to show up for interviews, to limited social networks to support their business - young people are facing barrier after barrier). As National Treasury considers the renewal for the programme funding beyond March 2024, it's important to keep in mind these challenges. Because we can't expect young people to thrive if we don't invest in them; and a failure to invest in youth is a failure to invest in the future of our country.

"LEARNERS ARE FUTURE LEADERS - SO WE NEED TO DO WHAT WE CAN TO SUPPORT THEM! LET US ALL JOIN HANDS IN BUILDING OUR FUTURE CUSTODIANS."

- teacher's assistant



LEBOGANG MACHUBENE

Age: 31

Location: Ga Sekgopo, Limpopo
Makeleketla Primary School

Before joining the programme, I ran a small business. Working as an assistant taught me many things. I learnt a lot about kids, I gained experience working in the office, assisting in the class and I managed to save money to take care of my needs. This experience motivated me to start studying Education. I want to study teaching and become a full-time teacher.

LUKHANYO MSHIYWA

Age: 28

Location: Mdantsane, Eastern Cape
Sakhile Senior Primary School & Hlokoma Senior Secondary School

Since I was a kid, I have had a passion for education, teaching has always been my dream career. Through the teacher's assistant programme I learnt how important the learning environment is - and the role played by both teachers and parents to promote learners' progress. It was incredible to witness that. I am still involved in education, as now I am a coordinator for a virtual after-school programme.



NOLITHA NKOSANA

Age: 30

Location: Soweto, Gauteng
Fameni Junior Second School

Through the teacher's assistant programme, I gained work experience, and I learnt how to deal with children in a positive learning environment. I also learnt that we, as young people, shouldn't limit ourselves to anything. Life is full of surprises, anything is possible - stay positive. Across communities, the programme shows the impact of changing people's lives, inspiring dreams, and pushing the limits of human potential.



MY EXPERIENCE AS A TEACHER'S ASSISTANT PROGRAMME SHOWED ME THE DIFFERENCE A MATRIC CERTIFICATE MAKES IN OPENING OPPORTUNITIES. MANY OF US ASSISTANTS COME FROM DISADVANTAGED HOMES SO THE STIPEND HELPED FEED OUR FAMILIES AND THIS IS BIG; SOME ASSISTANTS I KNOW MANAGED TO SAVE UP FOR THEIR DRIVERS LICENCE. AND FRIENDS WHO HOLD A UNIVERSITY DEGREE MANAGED TO GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE. NOW THAT I HAVE COMPLETED THE PROGRAMME, I HAVE GONE BACK TO STUDYING, AND I'M CURRENTLY DOING MY FIRST YEAR AT TSHWANE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY. WITHOUT THE PROGRAMME, I WOULD SIMPLY BE UNEMPLOYED, I WOULDN'T KNOW WHAT TO STUDY NEXT.

- teacher's assistant





NONTOKOZO SIBANYONI

Age: 28

Location: Barberton Mpumalanga
Mountain View Primary School

I have had a journey filled with transformative experiences that have shaped not only my professional life but also my personal growth. One such pivotal moment occurred when I stumbled upon a post that would lead me to the Basic Education Employment Initiative, which opened doors for countless young individuals, including myself, to serve as assistants in nearly all public schools across our nation.

At the time, I was working as a Sunbox Ambassador at Sunshine Cinema, and I had only three months left on my programme. The impending conclusion of this chapter in my life created a sense of urgency to secure employment before the programme's end. Motivated and hopeful, I submitted my application for the teacher's assistant position at public schools in my hometown of Barberton. To my elation, I received a call for an interview at Mountain View Primary, and shortly after, I was offered the role.

MY JOURNEY AS AN ASSISTANT BROUGHT A WAVE OF POSITIVE CHANGE INTO MY LIFE. FINANCIAL STABILITY WAS A TREMENDOUS RELIEF, BUT THIS ROLE OFFERED MORE THAN JUST ECONOMIC SECURITY. IT PROVIDED A PLATFORM FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH, EQUIPPING ME WITH INVALUABLE SKILLS THAT HAVE SINCE BECOME THE FOUNDATION OF MY CAREER.

I learned the art of effective communication, forward-thinking, adaptability, and providing unwavering support and assistance to individual students and small groups. I helped these young minds not only understand their academic content but also complete assignments and face the challenges of education with confidence. It was a rewarding experience to witness the growth and progress of the students I interacted with daily.

As my tenure as an assistant approached its conclusion, an exciting opportunity arose. In May 2022, I was offered a position as a Media Coordinator at Sunshine Cinema in Cape Town. My journey had come full circle, returning to the organization where I was once an Ambassador. The experience I had gained during my time as an Assistant proved to be a valuable asset as I transitioned into this new role. It allowed me to effectively balance the demands of my professional life, employing the skills I had acquired in my dual roles.

In my current position as a Marketing and Communications professional, I have the privilege of working with young people from diverse backgrounds, both within South Africa and internationally through our network at Sunshine Cinema. My journey as a teacher's assistant continues to shape my approach to my responsibilities, teaching me the importance of mentorship, understanding, and effective communication.

The impact of the PES and the BEEI cannot be overstated. These initiatives have bridged the gap for many young people in South Africa who, despite holding matric and tertiary qualifications, struggled to secure employment in their chosen fields. The opportunities they provide have not only contributed to financial stability but have also equipped young individuals with skills to further their careers.

NERO KOBELI

Age: 26

Location: Excelsior, Free State
Reutlwahetse Secondary School

During my time as a teacher's assistant in the Basic Education Employment Initiative, I assisted the Grade 9 teacher in marking learners' homework and assignments, I invigilated exams, and I helped with admin work. I felt greatly supported by the school staff, who helped me figure out what I could do next and recommended that I pursue a teaching career. During those months at the school I learnt how to work with people and improved my communication skills. This experience definitely prepared me for future opportunities.



OPEN LETTER

I was studying towards a diploma in teaching English as a foreign language when I applied to become an assistant. One, I needed the money because I was planning on leaving the country to teach English in South Korea or Japan as soon as I obtained my diploma. And two, I needed the work experience.

I was so excited to be placed in the English Department and under the leadership and mentorship of MamNxumalo and Sir Mashile. MamNxumalo has been an English teacher and Head of Department for over thirty-three years. New brooms may sweep clean but it's the old broom that knows the corners, and I knew that there is no one better qualified to teach me the corners of the English language. Sir Mashile on the other hand, is an incredible academic, with his finger on the pulse of cultural influences on teaching and learning. Working with him has challenged me to broaden my horizons by taking my studies a step further, go to graduate school and master what I'm passionate about.

As an assistant, my day to day tasks included carrying out administrative work such as typing question papers, photocopying, filing and preparing other supporting teaching material. I also prepared mark sheets and captured marks and assisted with classroom management. I really enjoyed proofreading the learner's essays, talking to them and basically establishing a good rapport with them. This gave me a look into their teenage world, the never-ending struggles of being a teenager. Boy, I felt sixteen again! But I think taking care of the minor details (like printing, distributing paperwork and classroom management) is what I love doing the most.

I discovered that I get a kick out of keeping and maintaining order. But above all, I love lightening the burden of another person. Although it looked like an insignificant task, it made a huge difference, allowing the teacher to fully focus on preparing effective lesson plans, thus improving teaching quality and effectiveness. However, these well-prepared lessons didn't always run as smoothly as one would like, as they were often interrupted or sometimes even brought to an abrupt halt by issues such as bullying, poor self-esteem, family affairs, learning disabilities, medical or spiritual emergencies (some learners would suddenly

go into a trance) just to mention a few. Granted, identifying these issues is part of a teacher's job, however I do not think teachers have the professional capacity to tackle them.

So what is the way forward? I believe the BEEI did support teachers in and outside the classroom to some extent, but the initiative also put a spotlight on how this help was not enough. One social worker or psychologist or guidance counsellor per district is not enough. Teachers are struggling to meet all of the learners' needs; they need help. Every school should have at least one resident social worker, psychologist, guidance counsellor and nurse. High enrolment schools will obviously need more than one. However, this will take time and money, in the meantime we need the BEEI to continue, to provide much needed extra hands in the classroom.

As for me, I am joining the drive to make quality education accessible to all learners, especially those in public schools. I went back to school so that I could gain admission to university and become a teacher myself - my dream now is to become an educational psychologist. Overall, I am grateful for the rewarding experience this opportunity has afforded me; I will forever hold teachers in high regard because of the phenomenal work they do.

Signed,

Khari-Sma Mashego, 26 years old from
Dwarsloop, Mpumalanga, Masana High School





I am currently a teacher at Mahikaneng Primary School in Seven Miles Village in Kuruman, Northern Cape. In 2021 I was fortunate enough to be employed as a teacher assistant by Learamele Special School. I knew nothing about being an assistant but I was so motivated to learn and explore. I fell so deeply in love with teaching that I decided to apply for a Postgraduate Certificate in Education at Unisa. Being an assistant really directed me to a profession I believe I was called for!

THE TEACHER'S ASSISTANT PROGRAMME HAS HELPED SO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE REALISE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL AND PURSUE WHAT THEY HAD ABANDONED. AND FOR SOME, IT WAS A WONDERFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCE. MY LONG TERM GOAL IS TO START AN AFTERCARE CENTRE IN MY HOME VILLAGE WHERE NO CHILD PAYS. BEING A TEACHER'S ASSISTANT WAS AN EYE-OPENER FOR ME, IT MADE ME REALISE MY TRUE CALLING.

LEBOPONG MURPHY MOTHIBI,

26 years old, Kuruman, Northern Cape (Learamele Special School)

NOMPUMELELO MQADI

Age: 34

Location: Okhushwini, KwaZulu-Natal

Delihlazo Primary School



I would like to thank our government for giving us this opportunity to prove ourselves as young people. I really wish the programme could hire more youth in the field because many of us are turning 35 and not considered young anymore - without having ever worked.



MTHUTHUZELI FRANS TSHAKA

Age: 29

Location: Nyakallong Allanridge, Free State

SA Mokgothu Primary School

Before I became a teacher's assistant, I was doing creative arts in my community, teaching children theatre, dance and poetry. During my time at the school, I assisted in sports and physical education- I also opened a school theatre production. I really enjoyed the experience, because I had the chance to support young people and help them on their journey. The teacher's assistant programme has helped so many unemployed youth across the country, and it has made an impact in changing people's lives by offering the opportunity to transfer knowledge and skills to the school learners, who desperately need extra support.

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE PROGRAMME AS IT HAS BROUGHT LIGHT AND HOPE TO YOUTH LIVING IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES.



PATRICIA DHLIWAYO

Age: 29

Location: Nyakallong Allanridge,
Free State

SA Mokgothu Primary School



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I applied for the vacancy as a Child and Youth Care Worker, because I care a lot about children in my community and I am concerned about school dropout in my community. That's when I knew that I could make a difference in my community, by getting the kids back in school: as part of my time in the programme, I conducted home visits to determine the reason behind the poor school attendance of learners. The teachers at school also encouraged parents and students to talk to me if they had a problem, so I could refer them to the relevant support programme. On my last day at the school, I received a motivational letter from the Social Worker at the Department of Social Development whom I worked with, and I also received a reference letter from the School Principal for my hard work at school.

Before becoming a Child and Youth Care Worker, I was selling cleaning detergents and I had playgroups with 10 kids, running educational activities teaching numbers and colours. The programme helped me see education in a new way; I realised that many learners need focused psycho-social support - they might have problems and they might not want to talk to their parents about it. It also helped me see that the lack of Early Childhood Development centres is a gap in my community, and I could be of help by starting one.

Now that the programme has ended, I'm self-employed. I saved money while being an assistant, and then registered and started a small cleaning services company. In the future, I would love to study Psychology.



MOSIMANE GAPE KODISANG

Age: 34

Location: Atamelang, North West

Phatsima Secondary School

I applied to join the teacher's assistant programme because I would love to become a school teacher, working with learners and coaching them. I really enjoyed the experience at the school, because I discovered the importance of peer support. During my time in the programme, I have considerably developed my psycho-social skills. Before the programme, I was unemployed, but I was developing business apps, and publishing them for a living.

Without this programme, I would have struggled to buy food for myself. This programme helped me to choose the correct career, as in the future, I want to become a qualified teacher.

PHIWE KONZAPHI

Age: 29

Location: Eastern Cape, Zihlahleni,
under Amathole West District

Phatsima Secondary School

I loved my experience of being a teacher's assistant at the school because I am big on human development. I had the opportunity to bring to life ideas that added value to the school and the learner experience, such as the academic awards. By doing so, I also gained experience in event management and got great feedback from learners and teachers. Now, I want to go back to school and get a degree in teaching.





SALIMO LEBOGANG

Age: 27

Location: Kekani Secondary School
Hammankraal Gauteng

Working as a teacher’s assistant can be an incredibly rewarding and fulfilling experience. It allows you to work closely with learners and play a direct role in their learning and development. It can also be challenging, as you have to juggle multiple responsibilities and may need to adapt your approach to each student’s individual needs. Overall, it’s a unique experience that can teach you a lot about yourself and the world around you.

NOKUTHULA LILICIA AVIWE

Age: 24

Location: Dordrecht, Eastern Cape
Milner Farm School

I have always wanted to be a teacher, but I couldn’t study further due to space constraints at the university. This opportunity exposed me to what my career path would have been like. I experienced first-hand the challenges faced in school such as absenteeism. Because I worked at a farm school, children couldn’t find transport to come when it rained, because of slippery roads. I believe I made a positive change in the lives of learners; they were taught in isiXhosa, but by the time I left, they were able to answer questions in English and relate to texts in English. This experience made me want to follow my dream of becoming a teacher. I tried applying for a Postgraduate Certificate in Education but got rejected because I did not have teaching modules in my qualification - but I am not giving up and am applying to more universities.



My experience as an assistant taught me that children learn and express themselves better and more freely in an environment where they feel supported and understood. They push themselves to work harder and succeed when they are cared for by their teacher, caregiver, parent or guardian. Now that my time as an assistant is over, I am tutoring kids in my community - because the programme trained us to be creative and take initiative.

WITHOUT THIS PROGRAMME, MANY YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD HAVE NOT HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE EMPLOYED EVEN IF IT’S SHORT-TERM, SO LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN DULL WITH NO HOPE, BUT WITH HUNGER AND STRESS INSTEAD. THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE SEES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROGRAMME BECAUSE THROUGH IT, FAMILIES WERE ABLE TO PUT FOOD ON THE TABLE, AND YOUNG PEOPLE WERE EXPOSED TO POTENTIAL CAREERS FOR THEIR FUTURE. IT ALSO HELPED EASE THE WORKLOAD OF EDUCATORS, WHO WERE ABLE TO FOCUS MORE ON WHAT MATTERS THE MOST - THE LEARNERS.

- Lerato Mercy, Soshanguve, Pretoria, Gauteng





CHARLOT BABLWA KERBA

Age: 32

Location: Thembalethu, George
M.M Mateza Primary School & York High

Working as a teacher's assistant can be an incredibly rewarding and fulfilling experience. It allows you to work closely with learners and play a direct role in their learning and development. It can also be challenging, as you have to juggle multiple responsibilities and may need to adapt your approach to each student's individual needs. Overall, it's a unique experience that can teach you a lot about yourself and the world around you.

After the contract ended I was referred to a Catholic school by a student teacher in my school for an assistant job - I applied what I had learnt , and I stayed confident while being in control of the classroom. I'm now a youth worker at a nonprofit organisation, offering after school tutoring, art sessions, bible study & surfing lessons once a week. It's so exciting that I stayed on the path of working with learners.

BEING A TEACHER'S ASSISTANT ENABLED ME TO GO AFTER MY DREAMS. I HAVE ALREADY APPLIED FOR A HIGHER CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION FOR NEXT YEAR BECAUSE TAKING A SMALL STEP LIKE THAT IS FAR BETTER THAN SITTING AT HOME, WALLOWING IN AN UNREALISTIC DREAM.



PONA KHOZA

Age: 26

Location: Gauteng, Evaton
Motsewapele Primary School & Bafokeng Primary School

ONE OF THE THINGS I LEARNT WHILE WORKING AS AN ASSISTANT IS THAT TEACHERS DON'T HAVE IT EASY AT ALL.

They need all the help they can get. Having to juggle the dynamics of the classroom, lesson plans and paperwork is no child's play, it can be draining. But seeing learners excited about acquiring new information gave me joy in my heart. I felt honoured to contribute and add value to my community.

IT SURE FEELS GOOD GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY YOU GREW UP IN.

The Presidential Youth Employment Initiative should expand to other departments. Not only can it reduce the unemployment rate but it also benefits households by providing young people with workplace experience, and credible references on their CVs.



I ENJOYED BEING IN FRONT OF LEARNERS, AND ASSISTING THOSE WHO HAD SOME DIFFICULTIES LEARNING. IT REMINDED ME OF WHEN I WAS A LEARNER, AND I USED TO LEARN NEW CONCEPTS BETTER WHEN MY TEACHER ASSISTED ME AND GAVE ME EXTRA SUPPORT.

WITH THE MONEY I EARNED FROM THE TEACHER'S ASSISTANT JOB, I BUILT A ROOM WHERE I BRAID CLIENT'S HAIR- I AM ALSO LEARNING ON SAYOUTH HOW TO RUN A SIDE HUSTLE SO THAT I CAN ACHIEVE MY DREAM OF OWNING A HAIR SALON.

XOLILIE NXELE

34 year old from eSikhwini, KwaZulu-Natal,
Matamzana Dube High school



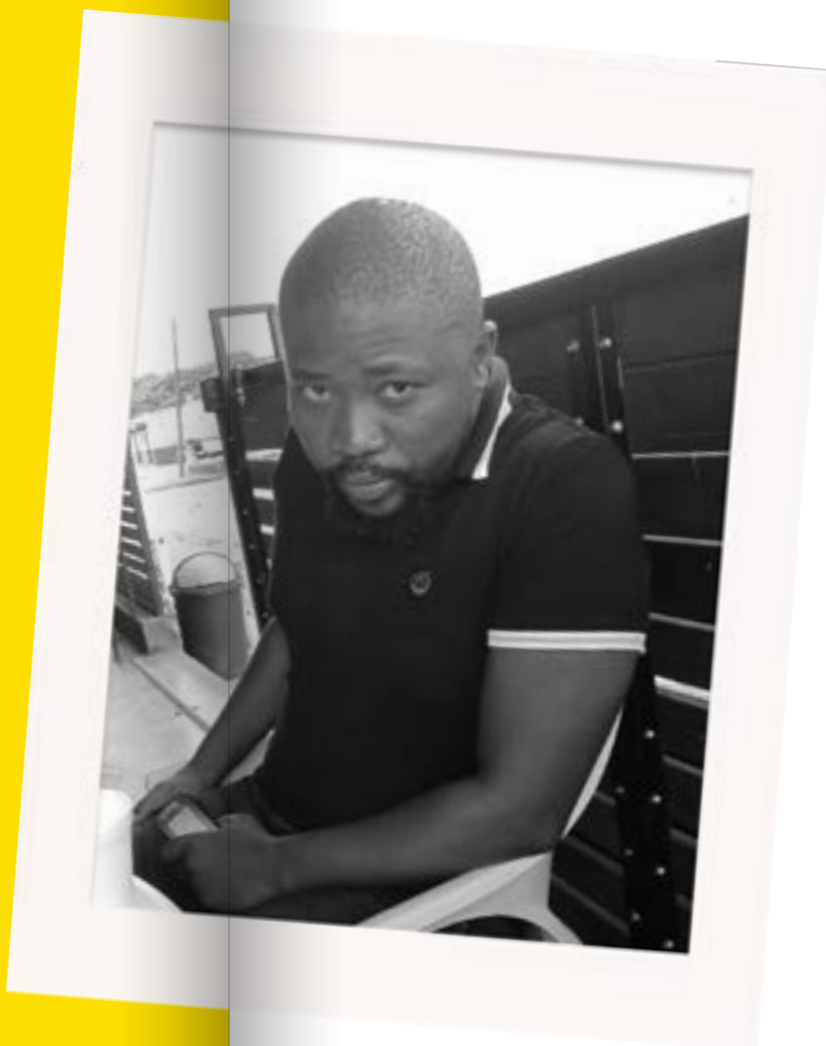
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I applied for the teacher's assistant position because I was unemployed; at that time, I was looking for a job where I could make use of my knowledge and skills, and also keep busy.

I really enjoyed getting paid and managing my finances - I could start buying some of the things that I wanted. The stipend really meant a lot because it helped me get by. The experience helped me grow as a person because now I'm considering opening a daycare - I want to continue working with kids. I can see the impact of what I learnt in my family too, as I am motivating my kid to work harder in school.

NTHABISENG NGOBENI

21 year old from Dwarsloop, Mpumalanga,
Masana High School



SMISO DLAMINI

Age: 30

Location: Richard Bay, KwaZulu-Natal
Ikhandlela Secondary School

I believe that working as a teacher's assistant has allowed me to make a tangible difference in the lives of others, by contributing to their education; I could help individual students reach their potential, as well as provide assistance to the entire classroom. But I was also able to develop my own skills and experience in the process, and gain real-world experience in education, which is invaluable for my future career.

Being a teacher's assistant gave me the opportunity to meet new people, and expand my horizons. It was definitely a stepping stone to where I am today. And I'm so grateful for that opportunity.

NKOSIKHONA XULU

Age: 26

Location: Ntuzuma, KwaZulu-Natal
Igugulabasha High School

I applied to become a teacher's assistant because I wanted to share my experience with learners, motivate matric learners to apply at Universities, and teach them how to apply for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme. Today I am working as an IsiZulu Tutor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and my lecturers believe in me. I am currently busy with my Masters degree.

The programme helped me greatly since I was able to put food on the table with the stipends we were earning, I was able to take care of my mom, siblings and my kids.



CONCLUSION

Since 2020, 860 000 young people have worked as education assistants in nearly all public schools across the country. Every community has a school - this means that in the last three years, while the economy started to slowly recover from the impact of the global pandemic, young people in every community in South Africa had the opportunity to engage with teachers and learners, master office etiquette, gain work experience- acquiring soft skills such as time management, conflict resolution and community skills, and earn money. While the experience is short-term, it has a long term impact - through both improved learning outcomes for learners, as well as springboarding young people into their next opportunity. These types of public employment programmes have the potential to set South Africa's economy on the growth path it so desperately needs.

Young people have told us how the Stimulus has addressed societal needs by promoting employment, skills development and stimulating the economy. It should be expanded, not terminated.

Youth Capital is a campaign advocating for youth-centered and evidence-based solutions to youth unemployment



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